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Transitions and New Beginnings (2019-2020)

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“Transitions and New Beginnings,” Lauren Toy (critical evaluation example)

Questions to Consider For Discussion and Reflection

As you read Toy’s critical evaluation piece, consider:

- How does Toy structure her essay? How does this structure help her make her point about drafting being an integral part of the writing process?
- What specific examples does Toy point to help make her claims clear to her reader? How does she use these examples to demonstrate how she has improved throughout her Writing Studies course and how she can use these strategies in the future?
- Toy discusses both global concerns of drafting, organization, and structure as well more local concerns of proper quotation. As both of these elements are important to developing an effective piece of writing, how you might you reflect on these in your own critical evaluation? What are the global and local concerns that you have with your own writing? What examples could you include from your writing to demonstrate this?

Transitions and New Beginnings by Lauren Toy

Throughout my first semester as a college student, I have improved through my confidence as a reader and a writer. Overall, I am on my way to becoming a better, more advanced student and will continue to do that through next semester as well. My development as a college-level reader and writer has flourished and has had a really great impact on me and my performance so far. As a reader in college, I began to read less novels, like I did in high school, and instead learned to read and obtain the information of more textbook types of readings. As a writer, I began writing more than I did in high school, whether it was a short piece of writing, or a long essay. My writing class was definitely the turning point in my transition from a high school student to a college-level student because of all of the information I have learned and advice I have received. I experienced struggles (that I didn’t even realize I had) with both reading and writing in high school that I unexpectedly learned to fix in college.

Reading was never really my strong suit in high school, and I would conclude it still isn’t today. I have always had trouble concentrating and pointing out the most important information in almost all forms of reading that I do, including books and even short articles. This actually makes it harder to even motivate myself to read. However, I have improved. I came to college knowing reading was hard for me, but with the requirements I had and the importance of good grades in my classes, I really followed directions. I made sure the homework was completed and almost always finished the readings assigned to us before class. I knew how crucial it was for me to do what was expected in order to complete the homework and understand my assignments. I have developed in my reading because of the motivation I have gotten. I was able to get by in high school without reading everything, but I knew this wouldn’t be the case in college. In order to succeed in school, which was really important to me, I knew I had to follow directions and do what was expected of me, reading almost everything that was required for me.

I have also grown immensely since my high school days of writing, including really essential ways that I prepare for my essays. The preparation in creating a strong final essay draft is thorough and something I have never done much before college. Free-writing was a really great tool that I was introduced to in middle school, but it was a technique that was for some reason then ignored in high school. It is something that has a great impact on the end result of my writing and really gathers ideas, bringing me closer to the next step in the writing process. Once I got introduced to it again in college, it helped me organize my thoughts before just getting right into writing a long assignment. This was a relief because I noticed the really great effects it has on my thoughts and my writing which follows it, which I never realized before.

In high school, I never worked up to my full potential with my writing. I didn't prepare with several drafts and was often not even required to hand one in before an essay was due. Since this was the case, I never had a "revising phase" either. In college, I have recognized the value of writing drafts in preparation for a big writing assignment. These techniques are crucial ways to gather and organize ideas and edit what is right and what should be changed. Anne Lamott mentions the positive effects of drafting in her text called "Shitty First Drafts." Very few writers are able to sit down and write their thoughts perfectly, including what they want to say, and have it organized to how they want it. This could be frustrating to not know what to write or how to write at first, but that's the whole point of the process. Lamott informs her readers when stating "The first draft is the child's draft, where you let it all pour out and then let it romp all over the place, knowing...you can shape it later...Just get it all down on paper, because there may be something great in those six crazy pages that you would never have gotten to by more rational, grown-up means" (Lamott 22-23). This is really great advice that I have used for the last three months as a college student and I have definitely noticed the positive effects of drafting.

In my second essay for Writing Studies I, I created both a free-write and a full draft before realizing what I was even going to end up writing about in my final draft. I had to compare two styles of writing, but I started off comparing the content instead. My whole first draft consisted of the pros and cons of technology. My topic sentence from my first draft started with "Is technology deteriorating or improving our way of life and thinking?" (Toy). Although it may grab the audience's attention like a topic sentence should, it went off topic of what I was even supposed to be writing about: the authors' writing styles. Thanks to teacher conferences, which were extremely helpful, I learned that my whole essay was on the wrong track, I organized a new idea, and I finally understood the prompt. It was frustrating, and this definitely shows that drafting is a process, but each step brings me closer to the final product and it is so helpful in the long run. Writing a first draft is just a starting point; it doesn't matter how well it is written or even how important the content is. The most important thing is that there is something written down, and then I can continue brainstorming and making my essay the best that it can be.

After stepping back and recognizing what information from my drafts I am going to use, starting to write the real essay is the next step. Creating the format of a writing piece has been a transition for me from high school to college. In high school, students were taught to pick three arguments, make each point into a body paragraph, and top it off with an introduction and conclusion paragraph. However, this is not a sophisticated way of writing. After getting to college, I realized it's not that easy anymore. Kelsey Diaz makes a good comparison in her article about high school preparing students for failure when mentioning that "If you were writing a letter to your grandmother asking for her famous homemade cookies, you wouldn't use a 5-paragraph essay. Don't do it in college. Your professor will most likely laugh at you" (Diaz 2). Diaz shines a light

on the idea of this flawed technique which helps the student understand and relate to the point she is trying to get across. I have always thought that a 5-paragraph essay was an easy way to organize thoughts, but often I would feel restricted to my ideas, organization, and even content because of this.

I now recognize this cookie-cutter format hinders many high school writers' abilities—just like mine. In college I was encouraged to create a wider perspective and avoid that strict format. Although it was greatly encouraged to step away from the 5-paragraph method, it was much harder than I thought. I recognized the negative parts of this technique but after being told time and time again to write that way, it has become a habit in my brain. Drifting away from this way of writing has been a challenge but I am glad to now know how much better an essay can sound when avoiding this method. Doing so (eventually) made it easy for my thoughts to flow in a less strict and structured, but somehow also more organized way.

Once I get my formatting down, here's the next step. When I walked into my first college class this year, my writing professor pleasantly surprised all of her students. She said that it is okay to use words like "I" and "we". Something that high school students were strictly ordered not to do when writing formal essays was use the first-person point of view. In one section of the text "Seven Ways High School Prepares You for Failure" by Kelsey Diaz, it states that "No two writers write alike...Everyone has their own way of saying what they need to say, and it's okay to just say it how you need to say it," (Diaz 3). Diaz makes a good point when saying this. What is really interesting to me is the fact that high school is "trying to prepare" their students for college but it seems like it's doing the total opposite. I understand that the requirements are very different in college, and that high school requirements just didn't include first person writing.

However, I think in order to prepare students for our future education, we should be taught writing like this to have practice in it and know what is expected of us. Using the first-person point of view made it a lot easier for me to explain my writing and my thoughts and made it easier for the reader to understand the point I was trying to make. This technique also makes my writing much more personal, which I know readers really appreciate. Making an essay personal allows my audience to feel comfortable and relate to me and the story that I am trying to tell.

Once I am in the process of writing my essay, incorporating evidence throughout will make it stronger. Something that I was always fairly good at incorporating into my essays in high school was quotations. I was able to become even better at it overall as I learned more in college, learning the right ways to include them in my essay. In the third chapter of *They Say I Say* called "As He Himself Puts It: The Art of Quoting," the author makes a crucial point about using quotations throughout an essay. For instance, the author mentions that "Quoting someone else's words gives a tremendous amount of credibility to your summary and helps ensure that it is fair and accurate" (Graff, et al 42). Including quotations is a very effective approach while writing. This is something I learned in college. I knew putting quotations in my essays made them better, but I never recognized the importance of them. Quoting someone's work gives me a chance to show my audience where I am getting my information from, making my claim plausible. Especially throughout my first semester of college, I have been using quotations greatly to help me prove my points and create a clear focus.

In the past, I have recognized that once my thoughts were put onto paper, they would sound choppy and not put together. This is where quotations help me again, in a way I never understood in high school. I realized that I would have a good topic and the right idea, but my

approach was a little off. I would write down my ideas, but then just insert a quotation at the end that I thought would work well. However, after tweaking the order things were said, it made a huge difference. A good way to do this is by having a writer state and explain what an author says before describing their own thoughts.

In the first chapter of *They Say I Say*, called “They Say: Starting with What Others Are Saying,” the author explains this theory by saying “This story also illustrates an important lesson about the order in which things are said: to keep an audience engaged, a writer needs to explain what he or she is responding to—either before offering that response or, at least, very early in the discussion” (pg. 20). In doing so, this allows my thoughts to flow and be backed up by a source, since a writer’s thoughts are often based on what an author has previously said. Introducing an author’s idea before my own is a really helpful technique while writing and is especially essential when trying to argue a claim. This is because it keeps the audience interested in what I am writing about, which is so important. By learning the right ways to incorporate this into my essay, it quickly flowed better and became a lot easier to read. This has been something that I have used a lot in introducing new topics and proving points. It has helped me keep my readers engaged, make my essays flow better, and be more intellectual... which all results in the most important part, helping me claim my argument.

As you can see, I have developed as a reader and especially a writer during these past few months. I have learned a lot in my classes and I have grown so much academically. The techniques I have learned have helped me edit my essays and have made them so much better. Drafting, formatting, point of view, and quoting are important methods of writing that have guided me through my first semester of college by helping me find the focus of my essay, organize ideas, and make my statements clear, strong, and personal. Throughout my first experience as a college student, I have felt very excited to have learned so much about the tools to succeed and have grown so much as a reader and writer since I was a high school student.

Works Cited

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